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# Program Looks at Women in Prison

By Karima Amin

When we think of a "prisoner," we rarely see a woman's face and yet, women comprise the fastest growing segment of the prison population. Some women in prison are addicted to drugs, which they originally took to escape a life of hardship and/or childhood trauma. Some were involved with prostitution. Many were caught acting as "mules" in drug trades. Most have been victims of domestic violence at some point in their lives. These women are over-whelmingly poor and women of color. The unique needs of women in prison differ considerably from that of men. And, if that woman is a mother, her issues are compounded and even more complicated. Many women in prison are subject to sexual abuse.

The next meeting of Prisoners Are People Too will take place on Monday, October 26th. This meeting will open with a screening of the film, "Tree Shade", in which an African American teenage girl, Savannah, takes an imaginative journey through time and space to witness the prison convictions of her great grandmother Etta Mae, her grand-aunt Olive, and her aunt Denise. This is a film that speaks volumes about identity and self-worth where shame and embarrassment can be defining factors for women.

Our guest speaker, Dr. Catherine Fisher Collins is an Associate Professor at SUNY Buffalo's Empire State College who works with graduate and undergraduate students in the fields of Health Care and Criminal Justice. She is a respected author of several



**Dr. Catherine Fisher Collins** publications, mostly dealing with the incarceration of black women. Her most recent research will be published later this year as The Incarceration of African American Women: Causes, Experiences, and Effects (1997-2007).

Following the Attica Uprising, Gov. Hugh Carey appointed Dr. Collins to serve on the NYS Commission of Corrections' Medical Review Board. As the first nurse appointed to this position, she served in this capacity for five years, reviewing all New York State prisoners' health complaints and deaths.

She has lectured on issues of incarcerated women at the University of South Africa Law School, the University of Alaska, Buffalo State College's Criminal Justice Department, the New York School Board Association, and SUNY Buffalo's Women's Studies Department. Next year, Dr. Collins will be a featured speaker at the 9th Annual "Sisters to Sisters: In the Spirit Conference" in New York City.

Prisoners Are People Too programs are sponsored by The Circle of Supporters for Reformed Offenders and Friends of BaBa Eng. For further information, contact Karima Amin: 716-834-8438; [karima@prisonersarepeopletoo.org](mailto:karima@prisonersarepeopletoo.org).